

Lincoln and His Assassin

LINCOLN TALKS: A Biography in Anecdote. Compiled by Emanuel Hertz. New York: The Viking Press. \$3. (Published Feb. 14).

Reviewed by PAUL H. BUCK

MR. HERTZ presents in this volume some seven hundred pages of anecdotes about Abraham Lincoln. The stories are given as they were related by the people who experienced them. The result is a book by many authors—possibly as many as a thousand—reporting from memory the episode or two in which their paths and Lincoln's crossed. The group in its totality is catholic in composition—ranging from the humble to the great, through friends and enemies, covering the entirety of Lincoln's career and giving the full range of his personality. One common trait runs through all the reporting. Each storyteller is fully conscious that his own more or less ordinary life has been given a degree of immortality because of its contact with the martyred President. The effect of this on the reporting needs no elaboration.

Mr. Hertz's part in the making of the book is a mere scissors and paste performance. All of the stories which he uses have, I believe, previously appeared in print. He eschews all effort at critical appraisal of the anecdotes he includes. A good number of them would stand up under rigorous tests of accuracy and reliability. But many are little more than "Lincoln stories" with all the embroidery any one familiar with the memories and the motivations of eye-witnesses will recognize. Mr. Hertz is not unaware that the credibility of some of his stories might be questioned. He has sought primarily completeness on the assumption that in the totality of many stories all personal equations will have canceled one another out and that the result will approach a more objective portrait of Lincoln than any one man could have drawn. It is true that the compilation does achieve the result of a vivid and consistent Lincoln. But it is the Lincoln of the legend—a great, wise, human Lincoln, not untrue to fact in a large sense even if fact in a small sense has been badly distorted.

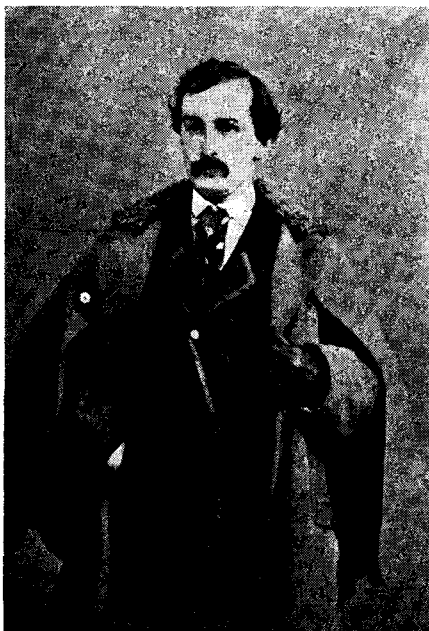
The book, of course, is not biography. It is rather a sort of reference book of "Lincoln stories." Indeed Mr. Hertz dedicates his book to "all the speakers and writers who have ever used, or intend to use, a 'Lincoln story.'" That numerous and motley tribe will soon discover the unrivaled utility of the book in this respect. Finally the compilation should interest students of humor. For Lincoln was a great story-teller.

Paul H. Buck's "Road to Reunion" won the Pulitzer Prize for history.

THE MAN WHO KILLED LINCOLN. The Story of John Wilkes Booth and His Part in the Assassination. By Philip Van Doren Stern. New York: Random House. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THIS book is an effective piece of semi-fictional reconstruction. Assuming that the method is legitimate (which to the present reviewer seems quite an assumption), the volume constitutes a vivid and absorbing page from the past. Mr. Stern begins with the night of April 11, 1865—with John Wilkes Booth watching the jubilant crowd of serenaders who poured into the White House grounds and heard Lincoln make his speech hailing Lee's surrender. A few



John Wilkes Booth

pages later, and he is dealing with the events of Friday, April 14; dealing with them from John Wilkes Booth's point of view. He describes the preparations Booth made, retails his last conversations with Mrs. Surratt, her son, Paine, Atzerodt, and the others involved in his plot, analyzes the thoughts whirling through his brain. He tells of the beginning of the performance at Ford's Theater, of Booth's wait for the moment when the stage would be almost empty, of his stealthy entrance into the President's box, of the shot, of his plunge to the floor below, and of his escape past Harry Hawk, past Laura Keane, to the stage door at the rear. Then he shifts the scene suddenly to the house on Lafayette Square where Paine mounts the stair, disguised as a messenger with medicine, to stab the invalid Seward.

The best part of the book, however, is

the second half, which tells of Booth's ten days of flight and agony. The story of his half-fainting ride across the Potomac at Anacostia, of his arrival at Dr. Mudd's house for treatment in the early dawn of April 15th, and of his flight to the swampy woods again that night, is vigorously, rapidly, and accurately related. Then came the long days of hiding and slow progress southward, until he crossed the river into Virginia; the final attempt to take refuge at Garrett's farm; the coming of the Federal troops; and his death as the barn burned. A brief epilogue describes the execution of his confederates.

It is not history; it is not fiction. It is something between the two. To this reviewer such a mixture of genres is decidedly dubious. Yet it must be said that Mr. Stern has poured an immense deal of careful research into his book. He has invented little beyond certain conversations; and he includes in the volume a conscientious statement of just what he has invented. There is no danger that any reader of sense will be led astray. The book may be censured on the ground that it makes Booth too likable a character, that it tends to blur the awfulness of his crime. But for those who do not mind a mixture of history and fiction, for those who do not object to the casting of Booth in the role of protagonist, the volume will be an enthralling story of crime and attempted escape.

Nazi Self-Portrait

LUNACY BECOMES US. By Adolf Hitler and His Associates. Edited by Clara Leiser. New York: Liveright. 1939. \$1.25.

THE lighter side of life in a totalitarian state is here illustrated, albeit somewhat sardonically, by quotations combed from recent German literature—from "Mein Kampf" to the most obscure village newspaper. "If what we have done here is lunacy," said General Goering, "then lunacy becomes us." Miss Leiser allows Hitler, Goering, and their associates to speak for themselves in hundreds of unintentional witticisms.

One can properly review Miss Leiser's extraordinary collection, however, only by quoting a few favorites. "Adam and Eve, oldest of Biblical names," proclaimed the "Reichswart" in 1935, "should be blacklisted as unfit for Aryans." A proclamation by the Mayor of Koenigsdorf reads: "Cows and cattle which were bought from Jews directly or indirectly may not be bred with the community bull." A writer in the Berlin *Lokalanzeiger* declared in 1933: "We are not and do not want to be the land of Goethe and Einstein. Anything but that." Although one could accumulate similar oddities from American and British publications, it is consoling to reflect that such lunacy has not yet become the official state philosophy.

The Beginning of Greatness

THE RISE OF GEORGE CANNING. By Dorothy Marshall. With an Introduction by Harold Temperley. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1938. \$5.

Reviewed by WILBUR CORTEZ ABBOTT

IF the first third of the twentieth century were known for nothing else in the field of historical research, it would be notable for its re-creation of the events and characters of the first third of the nineteenth, and nowhere more than in England. With the publication of Professor Webster's "Castlereagh" and Professor Temperley's "Canning" some dozen years ago, the knowledge and appreciation of the men who fought the Napoleonic wars and struggled through the dark years thereafter has grown steadily—and the stature of those statesmen with it. To this great work of rehabilitation the present volume on the rise of Canning is a notable contribution. It covers not only the early years of that statesman but his official life to the death of Pitt in 1806; and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find any like chronicle of any such man of eminence as is here drawn from the wide and intimate variety of private sources as this. For George Canning was at all times given to journals, correspondence, and what are known as "fugitive" writings, and the author of the present work has thus had at her command an amazingly extensive and intimate set of materials from which to draw her fascinating portrait of a young man on his way to greatness.

It is an admirably done "speaking likeness" of a man who, whatever his other qualities, was from beginning to end a vital and colorful figure. He had what is generally regarded as a heavy liability in the field of politics—a keen sense of humor and a pretty wit. He had, as well, strong convictions and a tongue as sharp as his pen. "I love," he wrote, "the bold uncompromising mind, whose principles are fixed, whose views defined." And he hated, no less, that "modern cant," which prates of "taste in morals," and all the cant of the species of the Friend of Humanity who was

"A steady Patriot of the World alone,
The Friend of every Country—but his
own."

It was a far journey from the author of that famous parody on Southey's Sapphics, "The Friend of Humanity and the Knife-Grinder" to the author of the great phrase, "I have called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old," and the present work covers only a part of that long pilgrimage. Yet with it and the admirable biography of Professor Temperley there are few men who have at long last been better treated

by history. There are few men, perhaps, who have better deserved such treatment, not only for what they did but for what they were. It has been acutely observed that while Castlereagh made the settlement of Europe after the Napoleonic wars possible, it was Canning who first made foreign affairs popular, and for that, if for nothing else, democracy should be grateful to him. It is true that, though he made enemies, Canning never suffered the outrageous and untruthful attacks which were made on Castlereagh by the young Radicals of his day. He never endured such a ferocious and unjustified assault as Shelley's malicious and ill-informed lines, "I met Murder on the way, It had the face of Castlereagh."

Not that he did not accumulate enemies on his way to place and power, as his duel with Castlereagh himself testifies. No man rises to such heights without them. It is only surprising there were not more. Yet perhaps even his humor helped to keep the numbers down. It has been observed of him that he was one of the most faithful of men to his official duties, and many letters in this volume testify to that. Professor Temperley has pointed out "the rigidity of Canning's methods, the severity of his economy, and the inflexibility of his disciplinary system." Many have joined in praise of the statesman who recognized the independence of South America and did so much for the liberation of Greece, who, in fact, contributed so greatly to the Diplomatic Revolution between 1820 and 1830. Much has been said of his "triumph" and his "policy" and his "legacy." And today, of all days, one may recall his words. Great Britain, he said, "will be no party to a general interference in the concerns of other states; though prepared to interfere on special occasions in her opinion justifying such interferences." And again,

"Much better and more convenient for us to have neighbors whose institutions cannot be compared with ours in point of freedom . . . a middle course between Jacobinism and Ultraism, with a view particularly of preventing extreme parties from coming to an open rupture."

All this is true of Canning—whom few men of his time loved, yet many admired. All this is true, and yet it is among the little ironies of history that, apart from general lipservice to his memory, what is perhaps best remembered of his works is that famous

"Decypher, Separate, Secret and Confidential Memorandum"

In matters of commerce the fault of the Dutch

Is offering too little and asking too much.

The French are with equal advantage content,

So we clap on Dutch bottoms just 20 per cent.

(Chorus) 20 per cent, 20 per cent.

Chorus of English Customs House Officers and French Douaniers:

(English) We clap on Dutch bottoms just 20 per cent.

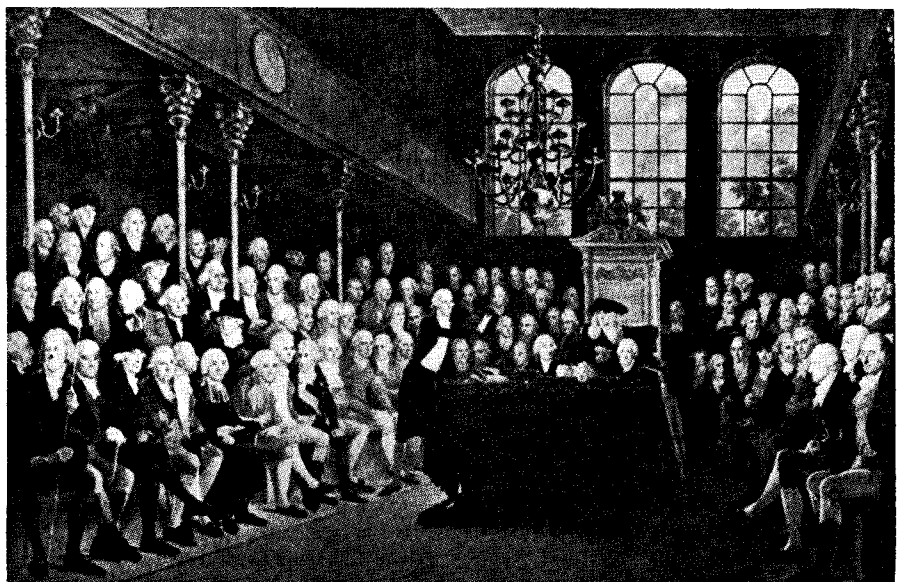
(French) Vous frapperez Falck avec 20 per cent.

I have no other commands from His majesty to convey to your Excellency today.

I am with great truth and respect, Sir,

Your Excellency's most
obedient, humble servant,
George Canning.

So here in this volume you have the beginnings of greatness, of the talents and the wit and charm which were George Canning—and here is something more. Here are two love stories—one with a happy, if somewhat worldly ending, the other wholly unworlly, and not, perhaps, wholly unhappy, and he the hero of both. For them, no less than for the picture of the Fortunate Youth who, fortunately, never quite outgrew his youth, we are grateful.



National Portrait Gallery

The House of Commons in 1739 (by K. A. Hickel)